

Message Text

UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTION DOTE-00

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 EB-07 AID-05 CEQ-01 CIAE-00

ERDA-07 COME-00 DODE-00 EPA-04 INR-07 IO-14 L-03

NSF-02 NSC-05 NSAE-00 PM-04 USIA-15 OES-07 SS-15

SP-02 INT-05 FEA-01 /117 W

-----072191 062039Z /72

R 061536Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2419

UNCLAS VIENNA 6288

FOR NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD, ATTN: MR. MRUNSTEIN.

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELTN, AU

SUBJECT: VIENNA TRAIN ACCIDENT

1. ACCIDENT OCCURRED AT 0215 HRS, JUNE 19, 1977 WHEN A RAILWAY TANK CAR CARRYING 55,000 LITERS OF BENZOL CAUGHT FIRE ON A JUNCTION LINE IN RESIDENTIAL SUBURB (MAXIN) JUST OUTSIDE AND TO SOUTH OF VIENNA. ENGINEER WAS ABLE TO BRING THE TRAIN OUT OF A TUNNEL AND STOP. MAJOR DAMAGE HAS BEEN REPORTED TO RAILWAY EQUIPMENT, TRACK, ROLLING STOCK, AND EMBANKMENTS IN AREA WHERE TRAIN WAS BROUGHT TO A STOP. ADDITIONALLY, BURNING BENZOL WHICH ESCAPED INTO VIENNA'S SEWAGE SYSTEM THREATENED DAMAGE TO FILTER PLANTS AND ALSO TO THE OIL REFINERY AT SCHWECHAT. THIS THREAT WAS AVERTED AND NO MAJOR DAMAGE TO SEWAGE SYSTEM HAS BEEN REPORTED. VIENNA FIRE BRIGADE, DEPLOYED IN FULL FORCE, WAS ABLE TO PREVENT MAJOR CATASTROPHE WHICH WOULD HAVE RESULTED HAD NEARBY TANK CAR ON THE TRAIN, CARRYING 32,000 LITERS OF LIQUEFIED GAS, CAUGHT FIRE AND EXPLODED. RESIDENTS IN DANGER AREA WERE WARNED VIA LOUDSPEAKER NOT TO SMOKE, LIGHT FIRES, OR START CARS. NO LOSS OF LIFE HAS BEEN REPORTED. ALL-CLEAR SIGNAL WAS GIVEN ABOUT NOON OF SAME DAY.

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2. IN JOINT STATEMENT, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND AUSTRIAN FEDERAL RAILWAYS HAVE EXPLAINED THAT HAND-OPERATED FLOOR VALVE ON TANK-CAR, ALTHOUGH SEALED, WAS NOT FULLY CLOSED, AND THAT ESCAPING BENZOL PRESUMABLY CAUGHT FIRE UPON CONTACT WITH BRAKES.

3. TANKCAR, OWNED BY WEST GERMAN RAILWAYS ON LEASE TO A HUNGARIAN CHEMICAL PLANT SOUTH OF BUDAPEST, WAS ENROUTE TO FRANCE. TRAIN

WAS INSPECTED AT AUSTRIAN BORDER POINT, NICKELSDORF, BY RAILWAY PERSONNEL AND CLEARED FOR ONWARD MOVEMENT.

4. AUSTRIAN RAILWAY AUTHORITY HAS REQUESTED OWN PERSONNEL AND NEIGHBORING RAILWAY AUTHORITIES TO EXERCISE SPECIAL CONTROL OVER SUCH TANKCARS IN FUTURE.

5. QUESTION OF LIABILITY FOR ACCIDENT REMAINS TO BE SETTLED, DECISION APPARENTLY RESTS WITH RAILWAY AUTHORITY OF COUNTRY IN WHICH TANK CAR IS LOADED (HUNGARY) AND WITH DESPATCHING FIRM.

6. IN PRESS STATEMENT FOLLOWING ACCIDENT, VIENNA MUNICIPAL COUNSELOR WHO OVERSEES VIENNA FIRE BRIGADE REFERRED TO CATASTROPHIC RESULTS HAD FIRE OCCURRED IN TUNNEL OR COVERED STATION, AND WARNED AUSTRIAN RAILWAY OFFICIALS THAT, IF THEY CANNOT BAR TRANSPORT OF DANGEROUS GOODS THROUGH BUILT-UP AREAS, THE PLANNED CONSTRUCTION OF COVERED STATIONS AND TUNNELS IN THE VIENNA AREA WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. MEEHAN

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Message Attributes

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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 06-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
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Disposition Event:
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